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TO : Chief, WHD

DATE: NOV 4 1953

FROM : Chief of Station, Guatemala

SUBJECT: GENERAL - KUGOWN Activities

SPECIFIC - Psychological Barometer Report - Period Ending
24 October 1953

Reference: HGG-A-440

1. The feeling of hopelessness regarding the local situation in general and Communism in particular as reported for the period ending 16 October 1953 still prevails.

Hostility and latent opposition toward the government persists but no significant changes have been noted that would suggest solidification of the elements which comprise the disunited opposition.

The outstanding event of the last week was the riot which occurred on the first day of the National Fair, 20 October 1953, when the scheduled bull fights were arbitrarily cancelled. Undoubtedly, the violence reflected to a certain extent the popular resentment felt toward the government, but most observers feel that it was primarily, and typically, a Latin American reaction of an apolitical nature. Unfortunately, initial and lingering resentment arising from the incident appears to be chiefly directed against Jorge TORIELLO, President of the Fair Committee, rather than against the government. Members of the CARTER group (See HGG-A-440) were present when the rioting began in the plaza de toros. Before and during the rioting they released small quantities of anti-Communist leaflets which were well-dispersed through the crowd by air currents. Many people were seen reading the leaflet after which they carefully folded them and placed them in their pockets or purses. The reaction to these pamphlets has not been reported in sufficient detail to warrant an evaluation for "barometer" purposes, but it is believed that such disseminations serve to keep opposition sentiment alive. Also, they obviously cause concern in official and/or Communist circles. The official and Communist press attacked the unidentified "reactionaries" who took advantage of the disturbances to disseminate anti-Communist, and government propaganda.

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Resentment expressed against the government because of the fair is attributed to the diversion of money to such non-essentials when money is lacking for more important needs. For example, dissatisfaction among doctors and other persons in the medical profession is reportedly becoming acute due to the critical lack of medical supplies, equipment and food in government sponsored hospitals. Again many of those immediately concerned are saying nothing publicly out of fear of reprisals but privately they are bitter and resentful. Their dissatisfaction is intensified by the knowledge that uncounted thousands have been squandered in preparation for and operation of the National Fair which until now has been a resounding failure.

The fair is generally conceded to be a failure even though attendance has been fairly good. This can be explained in part by the drab to-day existence of most Guatemalans and the few diversions or entertainment ordinarily available to them. It appears that their anti-Communist principles are not sufficiently strong to overcome their desire to "see and be seen" and enjoy a change from an otherwise uneventful life.

During the reporting period the semi-official paper Nuestro Diario published what was purported to be a manifesto issued by an unidentified liberation committee (See HGG-A-451). The manifesto called on the people to perform acts of sabotage against the government. The independent press appears to reflect the popular belief that the manifesto was actually a government and/or Communist plant which would be used to justify future acts of repression against opposition groups or individuals. Such a belief will almost certainly be sufficient to discourage the faint-hearted or indecisive from taking anti-government or anti-Communist steps. The manifesto has not been received with sympathy by opposition opinion. In fact all observed comments indicate that the indiscriminate violence recommended in the manifesto is definitely not approved. (Comment: Although no observed reactions or comments can be cited, it is possible that the appearance of the manifesto (as a plant) just prior to the arrival of the new U.S. Ambassador was so timed as to discourage any incipient anti-government, anti-Communist movements which might be encouraged to act on the assumption that a new U.S. Ambassador would lend at least moral support).

In the economic sphere the reported or observed attitudes are unchanged. Capital investments are governed by extreme caution due to unsettled conditions and Communist-inspired government hostility toward private enterprise. The continued intransigent attitude of labor, also Communist inspired, has the same restrictive effect on business activity previously reported. People of all classes seem to be well aware of the fact that economic unrest manifested in the recurrent strikes against native and foreign capitalists is a Communist

maneuver to create misery and chaos. Communist harrassment of the United Fruit Company is reportedly opposed by 95% of the workers who prefer their status as wage earners to the doubtful security offered by the Agrarian Reform. Many of the workers are reportedly concerned lest the constant attacks finally force the company to abandon its plantations and force the workers into unwanted "independent" status. Insecurity is the rule among agriculturalists, large and small, due to uncertainty of land tenure. Production is off and expected to continue downward until farm owners obtain guarantees that their land is not "affectable" under the Agrarian Reform Law. According to some coffee growers the economic crisis may reach its climax when the next coffee crop is ripe (beginning December 1953). At that time it is believed that it will be impossible to harvest all of the crop because of dislocations in the farm labor force occasioned by the agrarian reform.

Stresses within the army are largely due to understandable jealous between the "haves" and the "have-nots." The majority, and more significantly those in strategic positions, may be considered "haves" who are not inclined to engage in anti-government activity or take an anti-Communist stand so long as loyalty to the present regime is rewarded with money, prestige, and luxury items. According to a source with contacts in army circles, the possibility of subversion within the army is lessened by close control of personnel by G-2. Army officers are aware of G-2 detection activities and are careful not to do anything or make any contacts which would make them suspect. The same source alleges that the army is extremely "revolt" conscious, citing as an example the rioting that occurred in the de toros on 20 October 1953. At that time the various commands in the capital allegedly received instructions to be on the alert for possible uprisings which might use the bull ring disturbances as a device to lure troops from their bases. On an average of once a week an orden de alerta is issued to all army units cancelling leave reinforcing garrisons, etc. The alerts usually last over night and cause considerable inconvenience to officers and men. It is reported that the officers in particular look upon these alerts as foolishness and an indication of the fear and uncertainty felt by high political and military authorities. The most talked about subject by army officers with private citizens and ex-officers is lack of discipline. The older officers recall that discipline was much better in previous administrations and now the officers lack pride in their service, especially on this point. (The accuracy of this information relating to "barometer" factors within the army has not been established except for that concerning the loyalty of the army to the government and the material reasons for such loyalty which is probably true).

Despite vehement attacks in the official and Communist press, and friendly criticism in the independent press, it is believed that the recent speech of Moors Cabot regarding Latin American-U.S. relations was well received by anti-Communist, anti-government groups. General Cabot considered a reasonable and temperate exposition of U.S. views.

A local Communist, who reportedly expressed the prevailing attitudes held by party members, stated that party leaders are very confident and pleased with the current situation. The Communists believe that the opposition will never establish effective unity because the people are becoming used to talk of Communism after 9 years and do not react as they did in the early days of the revolution. According to source, public indifference to Communism has made it easier for the party to increase membership. Furthermore, the distinct division of the people into two groups - the right and the left, with the middle or center no longer existing - has also helped the growth of the party. Many who formerly held middle positions have turned to the Communist Party, no longer fearing to be stigmatized. The Communists believe that solidification of the two extremes and disappearance of the middle groups means the final conflict is nearing.

Formation of the Frente Electoral Anticomunista, consisting of the Partido Unificación Anticomunista, the Partido Unificación Democrática, and the Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunista appears to presage renewed opposition political activity. Although the FEA has evoked some favorable response there is the concurrent belief that it will probably not achieve success so long as the Communists enjoy the support of the government. Net result: the FEA is an encouraging sign but not sufficient in itself to dissipate the hopelessness which seems to enervate the majority. With good reason, the people do not have much faith in the efficacy of the electoral process to achieve change.

[Kenneth S. Givloch]

4 November 1953

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